

Using Quotations Effectively- Robert Harris

Quoting effectively is important because the right quotation presented properly can add spice, interest, thought, effectiveness, support, and respect to your writing. Quoting ineffectively makes your writing look like an amateur attempt padded by random comments from strangers. Here, then, is some advice that will help you incorporate quotations into your writing in a way that will give both the sizzle you want.

1. Introduce your quotations. A quotation should never suddenly appear out of nowhere. Some kind of information about the quotation is needed. Name the author, give his or her credentials, name the source, give a summary. You won't do all of these each time, but you should usually name the author. For example: a. But John Jones disagrees with this point, saying, "Such a product would not sell." b. In an article in *Time* Fred Jackson writes that frogs vary in the degree of shyness they exhibit: "The arboreal tree frogs seem to be especially. . . ."

2. Discuss your quotations. Do not quote someone and then leave the words hanging as if they were self explanatory. What does the quotation mean and how does it help establish the point you are making? What is your interpretation or opinion of it? Quotations are like examples: discuss them to show how they fit in with your thesis and with the ideas you are presenting. *Remember: quotations support or illustrate your own points. They are not substitutes for your ideas and they do not stand by themselves.*

It is often useful to apply some interpretive phrasing after a quotation, to show the reader that the you are explaining the quotation and that it supports your argument:

- Here we see that
- This statement shows
- Clearly, then,
- We can conclude from this that
- This tells us that
- From this we can understand that
- Such a contrarian view must nevertheless be taken seriously because
- If we are to understand from this comment that

3. Use some variety in introducing quotations.

A. Pick the quotation verb which seems in each case to fit your purpose most exactly. For example:

In this essay Green tells us, "Hope increases courage."

Note that the particular verb you choose helps orient your reader toward your opinion of the statement. "Jones says" is neutral; "Jones informs us" is positive, "Jones alleges" is somewhat negative. Other verbs to choose from include:

- says

- writes
- observes
- notes
- remarks
- adds
- declares
- informs us
- alleges
- claims
- states
- comments
- thinks
- affirms
- asserts
- explains
- argues

B. Sometimes you might want to use a colon introduction. For example:
Kumquat offers this explanation: "Deep thinkers talk little."

Or Kumquat

- is more enlightening:
- prefers a different argument:
- discerns this point:
- distinguishes between the two:
- reminds us of his youth:
- believes we should talk less:
- cannot admit that the plan failed:
- feels that no further action is needed:

C. An introductory phrase may sometimes be best. For example:

In the words of Fisher, "Art is a mirror of belief" (342).

As Ted Fisher has remarked, "Life imitates art."

As Fisher reminds us, "Monkey see, monkey do."

4. Sometimes you might want to begin your quotation in the middle of the writer's sentence. For example, Joe's Text: I live in the country where life is slow and soft. Your quotation: Joe believes that "life is slow and soft" in the country (*Living Easy* 288).

Or, Boz's Text: Sally, I love the delicious metaphors you make. Your quotation: Boz tells Sally that he loves "the delicious metaphors" she makes (433).

(Note: for embedded phrases like these, do not use ellipsis dots on either side. It is

obvious from the fragmentary nature of the quoted phrase that the quoter has omitted words before and after the phrase.)

5. Sometimes leave out some words to condense the quotation. Mid-sentence ellipses use three spaced dots. Example text: The surf on the beach at Mazatlan beat against the shore. Your quotation: Smith says of his wave watching, "The surf . . . beat against the shore" (Jones 788).

Ellipses at the end of a sentence use an end-of-sentence period and then three spaced dots. Example text: Rule 5 says, "Sometimes you will want to leave out some words. . . ."

6. Parenthetical material goes inside the punctuation mark. Example: The forest is variously described as "marvelous" (34), "fun" (98), and "dramatic" (39).

Compare punctuation without and with parenthetical material: John records that "all things were made through him. . . ." John records that "all things were made through him . . ." (John 1:3).

(Note that the period has moved from next to the last letter of the sentence to behind the right parenthesis mark.)

7. Standard MLA Citation Style is actually rather simple for most entries: The in-text citation is the author's last name followed by a page number: The new method was implemented to save money (Jenkins 242).

Using Quotations and References: An Example

Here is an example of the use of quotations and references (citations) to support points:

At the beginning of many of the Holmes stories, Doyle takes care to capture the reader's interest by proclaiming that the story just getting under way is an especially noteworthy or remarkable one. At the beginning of "The Five Orange Pips," for example, Watson notes that this adventure is one of the "many which present strange and interesting features," because it is "so remarkable in its details and so startling in its results" (Doyle 100). There were many adventures in the year 1887, Watson continues, but "none of them present such singular features as the strange train of circumstances which I have now taken up my pen to describe" (101).

As if this weren't enough, John Openshaw, the man who brings the case to Holmes, describes his problem as "no ordinary one" (102), and adds that he doubts "whether . . . you have ever listened to a more mysterious and inexplicable chain of events" than the ones he is about to relate (103).

Indeed, this declaration of singularity is a common gambit Doyle uses at the beginning of many of the stories. "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" was "so strange in its inception and so dramatic in its details" (191) that it deserves to be recorded, Watson says. "The Adventure of the Silver Blaze" is described as "this extraordinary case" (Castle edition 172), while "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" "presented more singular features" than any of the "seventy odd cases" that Watson has studied in the last eight years (Doyle 165).

As Doyle grew more experienced, he evidently grew a bit more sophisticated, for the later stories often strive to capture interest by tantalizing the reader. For example, "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box" opens with the assertion that we are about to read "a strange, though peculiarly terrible chain of events" (Castle edition 188). In the first paragraph of "The Adventure of the 'Gloria Scott'" it is Holmes himself declaring the adventure to be an "extraordinary case" (223), commenting tantalizingly about a paper in his hand that "this is the message which struck Justice of the Peace Trevor dead with horror when he read it" (223). --and so on.

Note that the technique used here is to cite frequently, though briefly, to build the quotations into the writer's own sentences, and to use whatever arrangement of the material best supports the writer's argument.